

## **Subverting the stereotypes: women performers contest gender images, old and new**

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The literary phenomenon explored in this volume, the new wave of women's writing which followed the ending of the authoritarian Suharto regime, has taken place in the context of a more general surge in prominence in Indonesian cultural expression of themes of gender and sexuality. Among the new freedoms afforded by the less controlled political climate has been greater permissiveness of sexual expression. Capitalist, commercial interests promote a flourishing of sexualised imagery in the mass media. At the same time, a loosening of the hold of the restrictive gender ideology of the New Order regime, aimed at creating an ordered, family-style state, and constraining women to roles of supportive wives and mothers, has opened up new opportunities for social and political participation by women. Political parties actively seek women parliamentary candidates to fill quotas of female representation; open discussion takes place in the media of issues of gender equality such as domestic violence.

Yet, just as recent women's fiction writing has prompted the critical responses documented elsewhere in this issue, so, too, in the wider cultural field, new freedoms of sexual and gendered expression have been resisted and contested. Representatives of conservative Islamic groups condemn overt sexual expression in the media, advocate stricter rules of dress and behaviour for women and promote 'traditional' Islamic family practices such as polygamy. In some strongly Islamic areas, regional autonomy legislation has mandated headcoverings for women in the civil service and other public positions, and for schoolgirls (Parker 2005; Allen 2007:106). In Aceh, in particular, women not wearing *jilbab* headdresses in public have been attacked and had their hair cut (Noerdin, 2002:179).<sup>1</sup> In the Tangerang

area, close to Jakarta, women have been arrested for appearing to act or dress like prostitutes; in the most notorious case a pregnant married woman, returning home from her waitressing job, was detained for four days after lipstick was found in her handbag (Allen 2007:106). The example of the singer Inul, castigated as immoral by Muslim leaders for her provocative dance style, subject to attempted banning from television appearances, but vigorously defended by human rights activists, feminists and politicians, evocatively symbolises this conflict between liberal and conservative positions. Inul's provocative body and defiant spirit resonated beyond the immediate context of her case when she burst into public prominence in 2003. 'Inul's bottom is the face of us all', wrote Emha Ainun Nadjib, writer cultural commentator and religious figure (*Kompas* 4 May 2003), summing up Inul's 'embodiment' of key contemporary issues in Indonesia — individual freedom versus authoritarian control, the marginalised 'little person' *vis-à-vis* the rich and powerful,<sup>2</sup> women's rights to self-expression, resistance to religious dogmatism, yet also concern to maintain local cultural values and moral order amidst a flood of commercialised, capitalistic cultural influence.

The huge controversy erupting in 2006 over the proposed anti-pornography law gave vociferous expression to conservative and liberal positions on these issues. Brought forward in parliament by Islamic parties in 2005, the law proposed the banning of both pornography in the sense of sexually explicit visual and written media, and what it termed *pornoaksi*, public behaviour by individuals deemed to be erotic. Heavy fines and prison sentences were proposed for anyone exposing parts of the body such as the hip or navel or moving in ways considered sexually provocative. A parliamentary committee set up to hold consultations about the legislation received representations from a wide range of social groups; other associations and individuals declared their positions in public statements. Again Inul was attacked, as an example of the kind of pornographic action the legislation should ban, but stated her determination to keep on performing as before.<sup>3</sup> Creative artists, along with women's organisations and representatives of non-Islamic regions, have been prominent among those rejecting the law.<sup>4</sup> Thousands of members of

these groups joined a huge march through the centre of Jakarta celebrating Indonesia's diversity and opposing the bill for its narrow restrictiveness; held in April 2006, it marked the anniversary of the birth of Indonesia's first feminist, Kartini. A month later a million people, largely from Islamic groups, held a counter event expressing support for the law. Verbal abuse and even physical violence was directed at the leaders of the pro-diversity march. Fundamentalist Muslim youth groups attacked the homes of Ratna Sarumpaet, director of the Jakarta Arts Centre and co-ordinator of the event, and Inul, as a prominent participant.<sup>5</sup>

As the months wore on with no news from parliament regarding the bill's progress, other issues took over media attention and public interest appeared to wane. There were reports that the legislation would be reduced in scope to focus simply on pornographic materials rather than public behaviour (*Jakarta Post* 12 October 2006), although proponents of the bill had ruled out any substantial revision (Allen 2007:102). In late 2007 the issue came to the fore again, with the issuing on 20 September of a Presidential letter requiring the bill to be considered by the original parliamentary committee plus three specially appointed ministers. Now titled simply an 'antipornography' law (*RUU Antipornografi*), with the controversial term *pornoaksi* 'pornographic action' removed, the bill will, however, reportedly include *pornoaksi* along with criminal pornography and a new section focusing on the protection of children against pornography (*Antara News* 4 October 2007 <http://www.antara.co.id/catidx/?ch=NAS>). Members of Islamic bodies have urged the government to move forward quickly, while the deputy chairperson of the parliamentary committee has expressed doubts about the prospects for a speedy resolution, which cannot be guaranteed by his committee but would require commitment from parliament and from a society still deeply divided on the issue (*Indopos online* 21 October 2007 <http://www.indopos.co.id/index.php>). Whatever the outcome of the ongoing debates, whatever form the legislation may eventually take, the law has become 'a potent symbol of religious and cultural and hegemony' (Allen 2007:113) in mobilising conflict between liberal-minded and conservative, religious groups. And at the heart of the struggle is the body and social behaviour of women.

In Indonesia, as in other colonised and post-colonial nations, images of women have long been a site of political contestation between coloniser and colonised, and among competing local groups. In the present era the demure, decorous image of woman as wife and mother, emblematic of social order under the unitary New Order regime, has arguably been replaced by problematised, contested female forms, evoking the current struggle for power in the political and social realms. What differs in the current situation is, on the one hand, the wide variety of images simultaneously arrayed — Inul, the populist heroine and self-made star; the cosmopolitan sophisticates portrayed by writers such as Ayu Utami and Djenar Maesa Ayu; *jilbab*-clad women demonstrating in support of polygamy and the anti-pornography law, but similarly-dressed figures denouncing domestic violence, or enthusiastically greeting a woman author of a book about lesbianism in Islamic schools.<sup>6</sup> The other unique feature is women's own agency in creating these images. Rather than simply assuming roles prescribed for them by male-dominated society, women are constructing their own identities. While their options are naturally strongly shaped by contextual factors — by job opportunities, by religious background, by the media marketplace determining what images will sell — the process is far more active than in the past.

In cultural expression such assertion of agency occurs not only among elite arts practitioners, writers, performers and visual artists, based in the capital, but also in the regions, in local communities, among ordinary women. I will focus here on several local theatre groups I have come to know over the years with a female playwright/director whose work explicitly subverts familiar gender stereotypes and longstanding myths of female identity. Until about ten years ago there were virtually no women theatre playwrights or directors; now the numbers are slowly growing. Characterised by close ties among their members, and connected into networks of fellow performers, activists, neighbours and friends, theatre groups are generally more socially grounded than writers of fiction. In contrast with fiction writers, free to follow their individual creative paths, theatre practitioners work as a group, in a defined milieu. There might be more potential for direct social impact from their work, but also constraint by factors of social context.

The four groups to be discussed are widely scattered geographically, located in Jakarta, Central Java, Bali and Makassar, and characterised by contrasting artistic approaches. In analysing the performances of each director and group I identify major themes and ideological positions as conveyed through their distinctive theatrical idiom. In each case I have identified a predominant bodily image emblematic of their performance. Starting from this image, I review the work of each group, along with some aspects of the life experiences and views of the directors and performers, as they contribute to the process identified above, of defining the contemporary identity of Indonesian women. What kind of themes do they present, what factors motivate their work, what challenges do they face?

### **Margesti and Teater Abu**

#### **The woman worker's body — strong, capable, resistant**

Margesti, leader, director and overall 'Ibu' of the theatre group Teater Abu, has experienced many different life changes. While working as a secretary in the Jakarta business world she married experimental theatre director Budi Otong and became a star performer and co-manager of his avant garde group Teater Sae. Then in 1992, after being invited by a women's NGO to direct a performance with factory labourers, she established the group Teater Abu, from *teater aneka buruh*, theatre of all kinds of workers. After several restructurings and relocations, as Gesti divorced and remarried, Teater Abu now comprises both factory workers and other residents of the area of Parung Panjang outside Jakarta — petty traders, informal sector workers and housewives. Here Gesti's house with her second husband and children also serves as home to several members of the group, as well as rehearsal site and gathering place for the local community. Now in her mid-forties, attired in long skirts, blouses and a head scarf in place of black T shirt and jeans, Gesti coaches, nurtures and organises rather than asserting her fiery bodily energy from centre stage.

The earlier productions of Teater Abu, when all performers in the group were factory workers, focused specifically on workers' experience. *Nyanyian Pabrik* (Song of the Factory) (1992) and *Mesin*

*Baru* (New Machine) (1997) dramatised fragments of factory life; *Mentok* (Ducks) (1993),<sup>7</sup> an adaptation of a play by Djayakusuma, consisted of a humorous 'trial' of a worker for allegedly smuggling garments from the production line. Though the group was mixed, women performers always played prominent parts; in the 1993 production *Mentok*, for example, women took the acting roles while the men provided musical accompaniment. More recent productions, such as *Perempuan* (Women) (2000) and *Opera Nasi Kering* (Stale Rice Opera) (2001), with casts of more mixed occupation, including many local women, have highlighted domestic themes as well as workers' experiences.

Teater Abu's characteristic style focuses on individual and group movement, accompanied by music and often also song. Dialogue is generally fragmentary, sometimes slogan-like, sometimes poetic and metaphorical. Gesti reports that during her early rehearsals with factory workers she drew on folk songs and dance and other simple forms for ease of communication with untried actors. Later music and poetry remained an important part of Teater Abu's activities, as a medium of shared recreation and expression of personal identity. For in Gesti's view the central value of theatre for group members is the opportunity to meet and do something together, escaping from the dreary routine and drudgery of their everyday lives. Fulfilling this need for self-expression and for bonds of friendship, she hopes that her theatre will give performers the freedom to develop and add value to their lives.<sup>8</sup> For Gesti herself, one might suggest, working with Teater Abu engages her love of rhythm and music, her impressive singing skills and vibrant energy; collaborations with NGO groups introduce assertive slogans, while at times, particularly in more recent productions, an intense, abstract, symbolic quality recalls the style of Teater Sae.

Performances often depict the hardship of workers' conditions and of women's lives, yet also contain assertions of resistance and collective strength. An example is the production *Perempuan*, staged to celebrate Independence Day 2000. Prepared originally in collaboration with an NGO, after differences with this group over style and approach, *Perempuan* was staged independently by

Teater Abu in several locations, including women's prisons and old people's homes. A group of male musicians accompanied the group of twelve women and several male actors.

In an opening household scene, a group of women occupies the stage, performing domestic tasks such as ironing, washing clothes and cleaning the floor. A swaggering male figure enters, and demands 'Where is my wife? I own her body and soul'. Then, seizing his cowering wife by the hair, he announces that he beats her in order to educate her. But as he goes to kick her, the wife, played by a hefty middle-aged actor, seizes his leg and drags him offstage. The women regroup, spreading their arms, punching the air and chanting defiantly in chorus 'We must do something! We must do something!' They move across the stage, stamping and clapping as they sing 'Let's establish justice, create democracy', for the country is on the move, in a new, hopeful direction.

The next segment concerns sexual exploitation of Indonesian women by Japanese soldiers during the Japanese Occupation, with several women victims relating harrowing tales of their experiences. Another narrative of female suffering follows. But the performance ends on an assertive upbeat note, with all twelve women in the cast moving about the stage, carrying placards and singing:

Independent Indonesian women  
Determined and with vision  
Resolve and promise  
To create peace.<sup>9</sup>

A more recent Teater Abu production *Mereka Bilang Aku Perempuan* (They say I'm a woman) refers again to women's strength and capability, along with more problematic themes. Adapted from a script by Ken Zureida, wife of playwright and poet Rendra, the production toured several cities in 2004, and in May 2005 was performed in the grounds of the Taman Ismail Marzuki Arts Centre to celebrate international workers' day. As the play opens several middle-aged women in factory-style protective clothing — long coats, caps and gloves — push heavy metal barrels around the performance space. Two younger women in shorts and T-shirts, slim and fit, irons in hand, race frenetically back and forth, leaping over the barrels, running on the

spot. Male performers, dressed for relaxation in sarongs, whistle to unseen songbirds, play flutes and toss around a soccer ball. Women work — in the factory, performing domestic tasks — while men play.

In a following scene four women wash clothes in tubs of water and scrub them in a soapy lather on the ground. Two young women in the background iron, first squatting on a table, then standing on the table ironing the air, as the men play ball. The women talk about a fellow woman worker who has not returned after a demonstration, and another thrown out of her lodgings after being made pregnant by her supervisor.

Having a womb, getting pregnant  
having a child,  
that's our pride and joy as women

chant the washers, each chiming in with a line. But one of their number, less philosophical, hurls a wet, soapy item into a group of male viewers. 'Here, wash your child's shirt!' she yells, to hearty laughter from the audience.

A male actor begins a monologue, walking around the stage beating a soccer ball with a small machete, reciting a long list of the effects of poverty and hunger:

Stemming from hunger we beg ...  
Because of hunger we lie ...

One young woman with an iron gets down from the table, frantically ironing herself, then the male actor's sarong, slipping between his legs and ironing upwards. Then she leaps astride one of the iron barrels, now full of water, and continues the chant:

Because of hunger we are oppressed  
Because of hunger we are afraid ...

Fierce drum beating underlines the frenetic mood of the scene, yet other women actors continue with household tasks — washing, frying food. The young woman with the iron plunges into the barrel, repeatedly surfacing, then disappearing again. Finally she hauls herself up, stands on top of the barrel dripping wet, shrieking 'Hungry! Hungry! Hungry!' then drops back into the water and disappears for good.



In a following scene this actor lies on the ground, surrounded by grieving women, as other women perform a slow dance. A distraught male actor speaks of going to the city to earn money for his destitute family but returning empty-handed. A young man with long hair, holding a huge black umbrella in one hand and a frying pan in the other, gazes at his reflection in the pan, repeating the words 'Father cannot die.' The women hurl wet washing items at him in fury, but to no avail. The missiles fall short, are deflected by the umbrella or land harmlessly on his shoulder. The closing images are multivalent, the dialogue metaphorical and opaque. What seems to be suggested is a sense of female frustration and anger, and male-female conflict.

The performance overall conveys women's strength, skills and remarkable energy. The female actor's bodily image is tough and powerful, pushing the barrels, and lithe, athletic, energetic as she flies about the stage. Yet there is suggestion of entrapment — in constant work, which men avoid, and in a manic struggle — with economic pressures, with images of efficiency, perhaps also conflicting aims and desires — symbolised by the figure in the water barrel, surfacing briefly, then plunging down again. In a separate short performance developed from the water barrel scene, entitled *Siti Nurbaya Lari-lari*, 'Siti Nurbaya on the Run', the same actor Liswati takes on the persona of the modern Indonesian woman, breaking free of the bonds of tradition but bombarded by the choices of modernity. She plunges into the water, leaps out in bold assertion, but finally sinks, overwhelmed, defeated.

Yet clearly the struggle is an ongoing one. Lis, the actor, a former factory worker now intent on an acting career, seems anything but defeated by the modern world and its choices. Gesti, working alone to sustain Teater Abu as a community, constantly seeking opportunities for the group to perform, faces ongoing challenges — financial pressures, problems of geographic isolation, the tensions of a blended, extended family. Yet with assistance from friends in the arts and media world, with her dynamic energy and drive, her ability to combine personal and domestic roles with professional creativity and community action, so far she has continued to survive and thrive.

## Sahita — Solo

### Old women acting up — grey-haired, wrinkled, unrestrained

The female image which the Solo-based dance and theatre group Sahita celebrate in their work, like that of Teater Abu, is also tough and resilient, down to earth. But in contrast to the athletic energy of Abu's workers, the persona adopted by the Sahita dancers is that of a bent, stiff, grey-haired old woman. The radical subversion of their performances lies in the fact that the old granny is not confined to the sidelines of the dance floor, banished from active involvement in the world, but takes centre stage. As old village women perform the controlled, graceful patterns of revered court dance, and take on the energetic, provocative movements of the sexy dancing girl at *tayuban* parties, rigid rules of separation of high and low culture, and the exclusion of imperfect female bodies from public gaze, are undermined.

Sahita performers cite as their model the old women characters of the plays of the theatre group Gapit, which graphically dramatised, in earthy Javanese language, stories of contemporary lower class life in Solo from the mid 1980s until the untimely death of its playwright director Bambang Widoyo in 1996. The young woman actor, Wahyu Widati, known to all by her familiar name Inonk, who had performed the old woman roles, skilfully conveying their humanity, wisdom and humour, was asked several times to recreate such figures in the performances of other groups. Then in 2001 came an invitation from a male colleague at the Solo Arts Centre where Inonk works to contribute to an event commemorating the life of the famous modern Javanese literary figure Padmasusastra. Performances for the program should be based on a Javanese literary text. Inonk chose the *Serat Kalatidha*, the famous poem by nineteenth-century court poet Ranggawarsita, describing contemporary times as the *jaman edan*, the time of madness, using its sung verses to accompany the court dance form *srimpi*. She invited several former members of the Gapit group to join her as performers. Much of the performance follows the choreography of a standard *srimpi* dance. But instead of the expected image of refined, demure and alluring court dancer, the performers

adopted the persona of the most famous of Gapit's old women figures, Mbah Kawit, grey-haired, wrinkled, bent-backed, in her worn village clothes. Two of the other women jokingly suggest this was a convenient choice; with their limited dance training they naturally danced like stiff old grandmothers. Very significantly, coming together as a group, taking on a collective identity as old village women, was something they found liberating and enjoyable. Released from the rules of feminine decorum and modesty which constrain younger women, like real-life village grannies smoking, chewing betel and telling rude jokes, they teased one another playfully and let their imaginations run wild. Out of this experience developed their characteristic method of devising and rehearsing performances, working collectively, building up sections of dialogue through improvisation. As the name of the group they have taken the term *Sahita*, meaning togetherness.

The sense of fun and freedom experienced by members of Sahita in playing the parts of old women connects with one of the key themes of the group's work, challenge to the dominance of youth and beauty as constraints on women's activities and standards for judging their worth. In dance, particularly refined court dance, focused on the beauty of female bodily form, such standards are paramount. Very often women give up dancing publicly by their late twenties, out of shame at perceived imperfections of physical form. Sahita's representation of unambiguously old and imperfect female bodies performing the most iconic of court dances challenges these restrictions, symbolically claims space for ordinary women's bodies. At the same time the lively energy of their performance conveys an impression of the ongoing strength and vitality of older people.

Another major theme of Sahita performances is assertion of underclass village and *kampung* identity. For the dress, demeanour and speech of Sahita dancers marks them out very clearly as lower class. Starkly simple staging and the absence of musical accompaniment, as the dancers themselves reproduce the sounds of *gamelan* instruments, underlines their have-not status. Commentators frequently speak of Sahita's performances in terms of *pemberontakan*, rebellion. Subversion of the aesthetic codes of court dance, and the refined, graceful image of palace womanhood, is seen to challenge the long-established

customs of Javanese kings. Inonk and Sahita members themselves describe what they are doing simply as *membumikan srimpi*, bringing *srimpi* down to earth, making it part of the practice of ordinary people.

A brief description of the group's first production, *Srimpi Srempet* (literally 'tripped-up' or 'sideswiped' *srimpi*, suggesting the imperfect skills of the dancers) shows this process at work. Small quavering lights appear at the corner of a darkened stage. Gradually out of the darkness appear four old women, each with a rolled up mat tied to her back and a small lamp in her hand — an evocative image of poor village women on their way to market in the pre-dawn hours. They move slowly, gravely, across the stage, in the style of august court dance, and move into the conventional formations of *srimpi*. However the obligatory *sembah* gesture of court dance, expressing obeisance towards the throne, becomes an exaggerated parody, with chins on floor, bottoms in the air, feet stuck out at odd angles. Later the dancers rise slowly and stiffly from a kneeling position, with backs bent, facing away from the audience, and bottoms thrust towards viewers' faces (figure 1). The cheeky suggestiveness of this action is reinforced when the performers turn, bow, and wave casually to the audience, in a light-hearted gesture of communication totally at odds with the solemnity and dignity of *srimpi*.

Order deteriorates further as the dancers' impersonations of gamelan instruments shift to animal noises — dogs howling, crows cawing. The battle segment of *srimpi*, usually consisting of an elegant stylised combat between paired dancers, is rendered here as a wild, animalistic free-for-all. First two standing dancers lunge at one another, screeching, as their seated counterparts whoop and howl like dogs: then the seated dancers charge each other, flapping their arms and squawking like crazed fighting cocks. Inonk stands with arms outstretched singing about the *jaman edan*, the time of madness, as another dancer kneels before a lamp, singing the famous words of the *Serat Kalatidha*:

Fortunate are they who forget (and join in the crazy times)  
More fortunate are they who remain alert and aware.

The dancers take their mats and place them over their heads, clasped under their chins like prayer scarves, swaying and chanting words of



Figure 1  
From *Srimpi Srempet*

prayer '*Bismillab, Tuhan ya Allah, paringa pitulungan*' 'In the name of God, oh God, give us help.' They form a line, praying, and the stage darkens. When the lights come up again the women roll up their mats, tie them on their backs, pick up their lamps and slowly dance offstage. On one level these old village women are simply continuing on their way to market. But at the same time they can also be seen as setting out on a more spiritual journey, attempting to follow the straight path amid the chaos and distraction of these crazy times. Sahita's deviant *srimpi* dance can be read both as a humorous populist parody, and as a symbolic warning of the mad, aggressive excesses of the contemporary world. The prayer sequence creates a mood of sobering reflection. And the final image of poor old women moving offstage in line could perhaps convey the suggestion that it is simple, ordinary people who have the capacity to find their way forward, get back on track.

In later performances, the earthy, comic potential of the old women figures is developed in dialogues and role plays which also comment on contemporary social issues. As professional female

dancers, *ledek*, with erotic movements contrasting comically with their white hair and wrinkled faces, the dancers make reference to male sexual harassment. When Inonk, as prim 'group mother', asserts that respectable audience members never touch dancers' breasts, another performer retorts 'No, they suck them instead'. 'Don't touch my nipple', the others sing, to Inonk's consternation, and delighted laughter from the audience. Some suggest that the humorous persona of dancers allows the voicing of views not possible for pretty young dancer/singers, vulnerable to and fearful of hostile male reaction. Alternately one might suggest that the seriousness of the dancers' complaints is undermined by humour and incongruity of the situation, or again that the light-hearted context renders criticisms less threatening, able to be unconsciously absorbed. The co-existence of such multiple possibilities gives a heightened tension to this interaction; arguably its impact will vary from performance to performance and among different audience members.

A recent Sahita work *Gathik Glinding* (literally 'Struck and rolling')<sup>10</sup> moves away from the group format to reflect on male-female relations through the experiences of several individual figures — an older woman, confined to the house, playing faithful wife to a husband who is always absent; a girl child, left alone with her dolls, teaching them songs suggesting a lack of moral training from parents; a young woman who performs wildly erotic dance movements, receives several crude sexual invitations and laughs with pleasure at her influence over men. 'Ah, they say that men are powerful, but faced with a women like me they're easily overcome.' Several commentators reviewing the performance have interpreted this last figure as a symbol of female strength. The example of one woman exalting in her 'superiority in subjugating the men who hold her fellow women down' (*Koran Tempo* 17 May 2004) is seen to challenge the stereotype of female weakness, showing that women 'have their own strengths, although these are different from the strengths of men' (*Bengawan Pos* 15 May 2004). Yet the exaggerated presentation of this figure, and the comments of Sahita members, suggest a different intention.

The assertiveness of the young woman dancer recalls a figure from another performance, played by the same actor, who, after victory

in a fight, stands with one foot on her slain female enemy proclaiming 'I'm the winner. I'm a man.'<sup>11</sup> In conversation, Sahita members confirm the association, explaining both figures as women who have 'run off the rails', become *nakal*, morally-delinquent, perhaps also promiscuous. Inonk speaks critically about women who are willing to sleep with men in order to get ahead, who are given opportunities simply because of their youth, attractiveness and willingness to indulge men. For women to get ahead on their own merits is commendable, but these women enjoy wealth and status without having achieved anything. 'I want to talk to the men', Inonk announces. Men offer opportunities to new, young women often not mature enough to handle them, who receive criticism for their greed, while the men offering them such benefits escape blame.

Ironically, the responses quoted above reveal that male viewers are not necessarily getting the message; some, indeed, seem to be taking away an opposite impression. The hostility projected towards young women who assert and trade upon their liberated sexuality may seem surprising, given Sahita's pro-women stance. But it resonates with many comments heard in daily conversation by female performers of other genres, and women generally — denouncing, for example, the minimal costumes and provocative acts of women singers of *dangdut* popular music. As rampant sexualisation of the media facilitates the rise of bold new stars, and sparks a clash between global permissiveness and religious and cultural conservatism, Sahita's performances may be reflecting some of the resulting unease, envy and inter-generational tension. Varying interpretations of the group's stage imagery might be seen to connect with differing perspectives on these social issues.

Ambiguous suggestion characterises another key aspect of Sahita's performances, their reference to Javanese tradition. Repeatedly in performances the figure played by Inonk extols the revered status of the traditional Javanese arts, and upbraids her companions for failing to maintain their rules and standards. In real-life Inonk is indeed more interested in and knowledgeable about Javanese tradition than other members of the group. Such interaction also resonates with post New Order disillusionment with Javanese cultural values, seen as stultifying and 'feudal'. The fact that it is Inonk, the chief 'incarnation' of the

revered Mbah Kawit, who advocates tradition might suggest that her views should be considered seriously. At the same time Inonk can be seen joining enthusiastically in stage action which subverts the conventions of court dance. The irony of this verbal endorsement of classical, traditional art, juxtaposed with practices seen as 'destroying' it, has been pointed out and criticised by certain members of the arts establishment.<sup>12</sup>

Yet Sahita performances are thoroughly grounded in tradition. Because of their familiarity with Javanese *tembang* singing, court and popular dance and *wayang* shadow puppetry, Sahita members are able to engage with and play upon the imagery of these forms and their cultural meanings. Arguably their performances enliven these forms, and connect them in new ways with contemporary cultural developments.

The popularity of the Sahita group no doubt owes much to the familiar theatrical idiom of their performances, and to appreciation, particularly among male viewers, of their traditional artistic skills. Their subversive, thought-provoking humour, and non-didactic approach must also contribute to their appeal. For Sahita are certainly much in demand. In all they have been invited to perform about fifty times since the founding of the group in mid-2001, at events as varied as a 17 August celebration at the Central Javanese governor's residence in Semarang (dressed in costume, they were thought to be beggars and almost denied entry), a workers' festival in Jakarta, a cultural gathering commemorating the death of famous author Umar Kayam and a farewell party for an official of the Ford Foundation.

Sahita has established a distinctive and original theatrical idiom, drawing upon the established character stereotype of the wise old woman, using local performance genres, yet subverting and challenging traditional cultural symbols and social values oppressive to women. Celebration of the rights of old, poor, less-than-beautiful women to dance, display their bodies and have great fun doing so, is built into their performances. Through the processes of group improvisation described above, and ongoing interactions with their environment, performance imagery is created which gives expression to social attitudes among Sahita members and in the wider society.



While steeped in 'tradition', the group's performance style is ever open to extension through experimentation with new themes and dramatic imagery.

### **Cok Sawitri — Bali**

#### **The female body, subversive and sacred**

For the Balinese performer Cok Sawitri, cultural tradition defines her creative work in a deeper, more intensely focused way than Sahita's playfully subversive approach. At the centre of her spiritual practice and theatrical activity is the figure of Calon Arang, the widow-witch of Balinese and Javanese historical tradition and performance. A fiction writer, poet and journalist as well as performer, Cok worked previously with the *Bali Post* newspaper, and now has a position as a civil servant in the regional government. Active as an arts organiser, Cok also has a theatre group, Kelompok Tulus Ngayah, formed in 1990. Working with them, she first engaged with the Calon Arang story in angry protest against contemporary political events. Over the last few years her focus has been more spiritual, blending theatre and ritual to present Calon Arang as the embodiment of a powerful alternate female creative principle. Cok Sawitri's multi-faceted meditation on the Calon Arang myth is another example of contemporary women's theatre which overturns long-accepted gender stereotypes and presents alternate possibilities.

The standard version of this myth describes disastrous plagues inflicted on the people of the district of Dirah in Kediri during the time of King Airlangga by the witch Calon Arang. Assisted by his advisor Mpu Bharada, Airlangga overpowers the witch and her supporters. In Bali the story has particularly potent resonance, recalled in the dance drama pitting Calon Arang, or Rangda the witch, against the lovable lion character, Barong, and his followers. In Bali, and Indonesia as a whole, the fearsome image of widow-witch is seen to reverberate with deep-seated fears of the dangerous potency of widows and divorcees as women outside of male control. Cok Sawitri confronted this myth, first in poetry, then a performance monologue, picturing Calon Arang as an emblematic widow, suffering suspicion and predation from the surrounding community, and as a victim of violent political oppression.<sup>13</sup> More recently several other modern



Figure 2  
*Cok Sawitri in Pembelaan Dirah (Dirah's Defence)*

writers and theatre directors, including Goenawan Mohamad, Toeti Heraty and Ayu Utami, have revisited the Calon Arang tale, challenging the facts of the myth and its perceived cultural meanings. They depict the widow of Dirah as an heroic victim, a symbol of the oppression of the people by centralised state power, and the subjection of women by patriarchal structures and prejudices.<sup>14</sup>

Cok describes how political events in Indonesia during the 1990s fused with her concern for distortion and misrepresentation of the Calon Arang tale as the inspiration for her performance monologue *Pembelaan Dirah* (Dirah's Defence). She was deeply shocked and angered by the attack on the headquarters of Megawati's PDI political party in July 1996 by thugs of the Suharto regime. The event symbolised for her the suffering of the nation under brutal power-holders. It also resonated with the story of the assault on Calon Arang, a lone woman leader and her followers, by the massive forces of King Airlangga in the eleventh century. 'My country had become a widow', she reports.

*Pembelaan Dirah* is styled as a speech by Dirah to a court of law. Cok Sawitri takes the part of Dirah, dressed in white, with tousled hair, black-rimmed eyes, and red-painted mouth — a chilling, compelling figure rather than the hideous monster of traditional performance (figure 2). She enters the stage on all fours, singing in eerie tones, then dances, shouting and laughing, with another female figure dressed in black, with huge staring eyes. Dirah has come to tell the story of what really happened in the event which has seen her charged with heinous destruction and murder. She knows that the assembled throng have gathered, full of curiosity, to see this fearsome creature. 'Well this is me! I am Dirah!', she shouts, laughing exultantly.

But her tone saddens as she tells the story of the attack of thousands of soldiers, who came from all directions and smashed her hermitage to the ground. She instructed her followers not to fight back against the king's soldiers, for fear of causing further bloodshed, just as Megawati offered moral and legal challenges but no physical resistance towards the Suharto regime. Yet word was spread throughout the land that she and her followers were a '*gerombolan pengacau kedamaian* — a gang of disturbers of the peace'. For the sake of '*keamanan dan stabilitas* — security and stability' they had to be captured. Soldiers moved about the country, forcing people to confess that they had had contact with Dirah and her followers, so that they fled from their villages in fear — all in the name of promised 'security'. 'Power! Power is the cousin of fear', she announces with a sneer. Power-holders try to cover up their weaknesses with high walls and grand ceremonies, and project their faults onto others. So she has become the archetypal scapegoat, 'blackened by history'. Finally she has surrendered, not in defeat or out of a sense of guilt, but in order to lessen the conflict. Yet, rejecting the court's jurisdiction over her, she creates a final defiant display of resistance. To furious drum beating Dirah laughs, leaps and roars. Together with the black-clad dancer she shrieks and strikes the stage with her dance scarf. Other figures join the abandoned frenzy. Finally the movement stills. On the darkened stage Dirah sings a final *tembang*.

This performance was conceived and developed while the Suharto regime was still very much in control. The description of the attack by Airlangga's forces, and their subsequent terrorisation and

interrogation of ordinary citizens, recalls strongly both the 1996 PDI attack and other actions of the armed forces. The labels with which Dirah and her followers are branded — *gerombolan, pengacau* — and the values by which their suppression is justified — *keamanan dan stabilitas* — are core terms of New Order political jargon. Reference to the fear which underlies power, which must be covered up by walls and ceremonies and requires constant scapegoats, clearly connects with the powerful, monolithic New Order state. Cok Sawitri reports that preparing the production was very dangerous; she could have been dismissed from her civil service position. The first performance in 1996 was surrounded with tension. Cok fasted for months beforehand. The performance drew huge, curious crowds, but proceeded without incident. Another major performance took place in August 1999, and was widely reported and enthusiastically received. By that time Suharto had been removed from power, Megawati as female presidential candidate had been sidelined,<sup>15</sup> and the military were building up a new campaign of terror in Aceh. Hence Dirah's defence of the marginalised and attack on authoritarian male power remained both relevant and threatening.

Cok describes the background of her theatre activity as both spiritual and political. Although her personal practice is spiritual — she fasts and meditates, and has trained as a priest — political themes seem to come to the fore in her work. Her overwhelming concern is with humanitarianism, with justice for both men and women. The focus of her creative work is not gender relations or the problems of women, but masculine and feminine principles. 'Power is indeed very masculine while the spiritual is very feminine.' The question she wants to explore is 'why does the feminine disappear in the exercise of power? Almost all power becomes hard and brutal ...'

In Cok's current project with her group Kelompok Tulus Ngayah, the myth of Dirah serves as the vehicle for this exploration of the concepts of power and the feminine. The project is conceived of in four stages. The first consists of an evocation of the female deity. The core section of this episode was performed on the occasion of an international writers and readers festival held in Ubud, south Bali, in October 2004. In contrast to the climactic drama of *Pembelaan Dirah* described above, this performance is quiet, slow and contemplative.

Three female figures dressed in black act as ritual specialists, chanting and playing music; three white-clad, white-masked woman dancers represent the female deity. Cok Sawitri reads a text she has written in esoteric old Javanese which describes how the female deity, the essence of goodness, used the sacred symbols of the Balinese alphabet to define the nature of human beings and their inter-relationships. The dancers rotate, very slowly, tracing letters in the air in each of the four directions of the compass. Then they sink to the floor. The text recounts the refusal of power-holders to allow the story of female creation to be told, leaving the deity to dwell in graveyards, on the margins. Priests, meanwhile, defined the directions and locations of the world in terms of letter symbols. This original act of suppression of feminine creation explains both the rich bounty and the potential destructive power of nature.

Political critique and engagement still find occasional expression in plays of a different style, with more verbally-developed scripts and witty humour. A 2004 production *Anjing Perempuan* 'My female dog', for example, constitutes a wicked satire on President Megawati's dependency on military and political backers, involving two women figures, a dog and her trainer. Cok as trainer takes the compliant 'dog' though her paces, coaching her in the catch-cry call of 'Freedom!' until noises of popular disturbance and a huge silhouette of an arm holding a rifle frighten the dog from the stage. Exploring the spiritual, symbolic dimensions of the feminine, however, along with broader humanitarian and spiritual issues, now constitutes the central preoccupation of Cok Sawitri's work. She speaks of her theatre in terms of 'a continual process of maturation rather than simply being offered as a performance'.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile her own achievements, energy and dominant personality provide an example of strong, capable womanhood.

### **Sinta Febriany — Makassar**

#### **Gendered bodies and myths of the everyday**

For Shinta Febriany, a young woman performer, playwright and director in Makassar, Sulawesi, notions of the feminine and the masculine, as expressed in archetypal myths, are likewise a central

preoccupation. But rather than engaging with and challenging these myths, her performances subvert and negate them.

Shinta's performance practice draws on domestic objects and activities in attempting to create a feminine alternative to male-dominated dramatic themes and rehearsal processes. In conversation in 2004 the young director expressed dissatisfaction with the prominence of violence in contemporary theatre performances, including those of the group Teater Merah Putih Makassar with which she herself performs. Although intended to express critique of violence in society, violent stage action and its constant repetition in rehearsal in itself inflicts violence on the bodies of actors. Women performers, who are frequently the victims of violence in the play narrative, are particularly vulnerable.<sup>17</sup> Moreover Shinta found that the standard rehearsal practice of modern theatre, pushing the body to its limits of physical capacity, allowed her no space to express a female sense of reality. So when she took on the role of director she led the group in different, more contemplative rehearsal practices, such as watching for ships or examining leaves. At the same time, observing her performances, one notes the impressive physical skills of highly-trained, athletic actors which play a crucial role in works focussing intently on the body.

Shinta had directed several plays by other authors, and collaborated with an NGO group directing a performance about domestic violence,<sup>18</sup> before embarking in 2003 on a trilogy of her own works. In the first play in the series *namaku adam tanpa huruf kapital* 'my name is adam without capital letters', domestic objects and activities are mobilised to signify the liberation of men from masculine stereotypes. A woman figure first marks out a rectangular performance space with lines of flour — the domain of the household. (See cover image.) Three male actors carry out household tasks, cleaning the stage, moving cooking dishes around, feeding white mice (figure 3). They run on the spot and perform vigorous exercises reciting 'I have to exercise my body so that I'm desirable.' Then the men become 'objects' of domestic activity, as they are smeared with butter and sprinkled with flour by women actors, lined up and appraised. A woman performer creates a huge penis shape out of butter, describing it as the 'head of the house'. Slides of men and male body parts, accompanied by a



Figure 3

*From namaku adam tanpa huruf kapital 'my name is adam without capital letters'*

voiceover of women talking intimately and giggling, reverses the more usual objectification of women's body by men. A woman places a sparkler on the tip of the penis, and lights it like a candle on a cake, as the men take up clippers and shave their heads. Presumably this is intended as a bodily marker of their new status, part of the celebration of their liberation from rigid masculine stereotypes.

The mood of the performance is playful and humorous rather than aggressive or didactic. Yet not unexpectedly some of the audience found its imagery shocking and disturbing. Shinta recounts that the original ending of the play was still more confronting. In place of the sparkler scene, a woman chopped off the top of the penis and put it in a blender. After receiving many hostile representations, both face-to-face and in text messages, particularly from a group of young men from an Islamic educational institute, Shinta changed the ending to its present form. The young men were still not happy, but eventually accepted the situation and the play proceeded. Several male members of Shinta's theatre group counselled her to soften her provocative approach to gender issues in subsequent productions, fearing more tensions with audiences and the wider community. But the young director proceeded with her performance plans.

Shinta's second play, *Hawa dari bawah tanah* 'Eve from underground', performed in several cities in Java as well as Makassar in 2004, echoes some of the themes and images of the first production. Two men winnow rice, traditionally a female domestic task; at times they raise the winnowing trays to their foreheads, as if in offering, and scatter rice in a ritual-like gesture. Two women appear from behind a central box, dressed in costumes reminiscent of traditional Makassarese dancers, with tiara-like headdresses. But their bodily forms clash incongruously with the expected image of slim, graceful dancer. One is excessively fat, one bald. Their statements suggest rejection of daily routines: 'I don't want there to be morning: I don't want any "good mornings"'. Myths are rejected also. The men say the names of various figures from European mythology and history — Odysseus, Helena, Zeus, Albert Einstein — then those of Indonesians, both legendary and more local — Pramudya Ananta Tur, Iking Siasisa, Shinta Febriany — as slides of historical sites flash onto a screen. The fat woman screams silently at the sound of each name. Two small trees in pots are watered by the bald woman with a long-necked watering can, but then stripped of their leaves by the other woman and one of the men. The trees represent the tree of knowledge, Shinta explains in conversation. The performers are engaged in both nourishing and deconstructing the myth of Eve's temptation of Adam with fruit of the tree of knowledge. Later a male performer asks 'Why do I become bewitched?' and receives the female response 'I did not tempt you. My body is not a sexy dance.' A woman figure repeats 'I want to bear a child from the storm, not from myths'; a man, gazing into mirror, responds 'But I was brought up by myths.' Men, it seems, are more steeped in, nurtured by and attached to cultural myths than women. Finally, however, the man drops the mirror and it smashes into pieces on the stage — an act of resistance, perhaps, against the power of revered old stories, clichéd stereotypes and restrictive customs.

The third play of the series, staged in Jakarta in 2005 and Makasar in March 2006, *Aku dalam Keadaan Nihil* literally 'I am in a non-existent state', or perhaps 'I am back to nothingness', returns to a timeless era. The play begins with ethereal music, as four figures, three women and a man, move ritualistically across the stage, then form into



sculptured postures resembling many-armed Indian gods. One of the women chants ‘Who are we? How did we get here?’ and others chime in ‘At one time there were no snakes ... there was no fear’ ... ‘like when the world had just begun, when everything was still sea.’ Then come images of suffering and violence — women bent double, carrying heavy loads, and pounding mats, as if breaking stones; paired figures symbolically beating one another. Voices intone bleakly ‘When sacred rules are disregarded, the rivers run with bitter water’ and ‘when cities are destroyed and houses ransacked, fate which has been determined cannot be changed’. Finally the initial dreamy, timeless mood is restored, representing, perhaps, a state prior to divisive, destructive human history.

By contrast Shinta’s August 2007 production, this time with a theatre group of her own, Teater Kala, formed in August 2006, is highly contemporary in theme and stage idiom. *Kisab Tubuh, yang Terasing dan Semu* ‘The story of the body, estranged and disguised’ opens with images of hostility that people today feel towards their bodies, for their failure to meet the standards of perfection set by globalised media and advertising. Actors hurl themselves against the back wall, beat their foreheads on the stage and twist into grotesque shapes as they name their bodily defects: a mole on the right cheek, a scar on the left hand, short legs. Later the focus shifts to the alienation imposed on bodies by objects and machines, as actors type furiously in the air, mime a factory assembly-line and push one another around the stage on a huge trolley. Finally they cluster around a television set, mesmerised, greedily absorbing its images. But the videoed faces appearing there have been digitally manipulated to become horrifyingly grotesque. An expanding lump on a man’s chin morphs into an eye, a nose grows on the side of his face and two vertical ears on his cheeks; a woman’s eyes melt and run down her cheeks, to be replaced by a huge upside down mouth. Beauty turns poisonously ugly when it enslaves us.

Shinta’s achievement in producing such innovative, imaginative performances, working alone, in an outer-island city, seems remarkable. One important influence has been the supportive environment of the theatre group Teater Merah Putih Makassar, where she has been encouraged in taking on a directing role. The lively Makassar

performing arts scene has surely been a creative stimulus,<sup>19</sup> and Shinta's style, with its startling visual imagery and humorous use of ritual reference, contains playful echoes of the approach of several major theatre figures. Involvement with NGO groups has also been influential.<sup>20</sup> But a sense, nevertheless, of the challenge of working with unfamiliar ideas and communicating them to audiences in a novel theatre mode is conveyed in Shinta's remark at an arts and culture forum in 2005 that her work is 'not about gender'.<sup>21</sup> In response to surprised questioners, she acknowledged that male-female relations, gender in the standard, international meaning of the term, indeed is at the core of her work. But in Makassar and Indonesia more generally 'gender' is often understood as involving sexually provocative female bodies and hostility towards men. At a women's theatre conference held in Jakarta earlier that year her play *Aku dalam keadaan Nihil* was criticised for not sufficiently expressing the theme of 'gender', understood as assertion of a female perspective directly challenging and opposing men.

### **Bringing the groups together — commonalities and variations**

Several features of Shinta Febriany's situation just described are common also to the experience of the other women performers. All have had connections, either through direct involvement or sponsorship of performances, with NGO groups. All have worked in the past or continue to work with male actors and have friendly, supportive relations with other performing groups. There is a sense of lively engagement with their local theatre community. Yet other women's groups also experience similar difficulties — occasional tensions with NGOs and feminist activists, problematic interpretations of their performances. An important issue here, in the field of theatre as well as in women's literature as described by Pam Allen in her article in this issue, is the absence of a comprehensive paradigm to assess and appreciate recent women's work.

The lack of such a discourse with which to analyse and compare their productions may be one factor working against greater collaboration between women performers. While the groups discussed

above have had contact with and appreciate one another's work, they have not so far collaborated on joint productions, nor built upon the approaches of others in their own shows. Recognising the artistic isolation and other challenges experienced by women performers, the arts foundation Yayasan Kelola has embarked on a project providing selected women director/choreographers with funding and expert advice and the opportunity to see one another's work in production.<sup>22</sup> Eventually more interaction and collaboration may develop. But at present women's theatre groups continue to work independently, resulting in a rich diversity of styles, yet at the same time some striking correspondences of approach and theme.

All the performers reviewed above focus on the creation of particular bodily images of male and female rather than development of narrative. Exchanges of dialogue are brief, with verbal communication more often occurring through monologue, poetic speech fragments and song. Such techniques accord with the views of many Western feminist theatre performers and scholars, who see the form of the realistic play as restrictively patriarchal, while non-realistic approaches, subverting standard expectations of narrative and character, provide greater room for the expression of female experience.<sup>23</sup> The Brechtian strategy of estrangement through incongruous imagery, highlighting the 'constructedness' of gender stereotypes,<sup>24</sup> can be identified in the performances of these groups, particularly the plays of Shinta Febriany. Yet such approaches seem unlikely to have been purposely chosen as feminist strategies. Rather, shaped by the theatrical experiences of the directors and available resources, they arose intuitively as fitting the concepts and emotions they wished to convey.

Amidst the diversity of styles and characters — the assertive workers, elderly dancers, witches, goddesses and post-modern Adam and Eve figures — there are intriguing thematic correspondences. Teater Abu's placard-waving women activists and Cok Sawitri's Calon Arang both in their own ways confront political order; Cok and Shinta engage with myth and ritual, Cok seriously and reverently, Shinta with satirical humour; Sahita's playful, passing reference to sexual harassment is echoed and magnified to an angry roar in Teater Abu's graphic

portrayal of domestic violence and forced prostitution. Violence, particularly as directed at women, is a preoccupation of all four directors, as a performance theme and a concern in theatre training and daily life. Another shared concern, highlighted in the work of several groups, is that of domestic hierarchy and the burden of women's work — a site of angry protest, symbolised by hurled wet washing in Gesti's *Mereka Bilang Aku Perempuan*, and of humorous subversion, as males perform female tasks and are evaluated as sex objects in Shinta's *namaku adam ...* Both Gesti's play and Shinta's *Hawa dari bawah tanah* employ the image of a man looking at himself in a mirror, symbolising perhaps the continuity of patriarchal order and the myths of a male-dominated world. Shinta's work and that of the Sahita group differ markedly in performance idiom, but both groups invoke satirically the image of female dancer, rejecting the construction of women's identity in terms of their youth and beauty which the image represents.

The sexualised female body is indeed absent from the performances of all four groups, along with thematic representation of love and desire. This sharp contrast with recent women's writing may reflect differences between writing and theatre as communicative media. Fiction and poetry-writing allow more intimate, private expression than theatre performances as public events. Of the four directors, Cok Sawitri and Shinta Febriany are also writers whose poetry and prose contain more intimate themes and bodily imagery than their dramas. But, as we have seen, there may also be a more conscious stance. The Sahita group expresses in its performances feelings of ambivalence about overt assertion of female sexuality; Shinta distances her work from the provocative display of female bodies popularly associated with the topic of 'gender'. Suggested in their attitude, voiced explicitly in comments by Sahita performers about male promotion of sexually available women, is resistance to exploitation of female sexuality in the new climate of free expression. As commercial forces encourage women artists and performers in titillating exposure of female bodies and sexual themes, these women performers look on with concern, at a distance.

The alternative female identities these directors offer are fragmented single images rather than a coherent discourse. Yet these

images encode issues of common concern across the group which presumably resonate with Indonesian women more broadly — respect, equality and sharing of work between men and women in the home and in the workplace; liberation from cultural stereotypes associating men with violence and dominance, and women with physical beauty and subservience. Other themes, political and philosophical, are explored by individual members of the group. Tensions and discontinuities between different concepts of female liberation surface too, as we have seen. With rich creativity women performers and directors contribute to a lively theatre scene and a social discourse arguably central to an understanding of contemporary Indonesia. Watch this space!

*Barbara Hatley is Professor of Indonesian at the University of Tasmania. Some of the material in this article is also dealt with in her forthcoming book, Javanese Performances on an Indonesian Stage: Contesting Culture, Embracing Change (ASAA/NUS Press). She particularly thanks the performers and producers who have permitted the reproduction of images from video recordings of performances. Her email address is: Barbara.Hatley@utas.edu.au*

## Notes

1. A number of letters have appeared from Acehnese women in the Indonesian email list *Perempuan* (Women) protesting at campaigns by local authorities to not only enforce the wearing of *jilbab* headcoverings but also ban jeans and slacks in favour of skirts.
2. Inul, relatively poor and uneducated, had come from provincial East Java to try to succeed on national television: her opponent was wealthy Jakarta media star and Islamic proselytiser, Rhoma Irama.
3. Once again Inul's attacker was the *dangdut* star and Islamic figure Rhoma Irama, at a meeting between performing artists and members of the parliamentary committee discussing the legislation in January 2006. Inul reportedly left the room in tears after Rhoma's denunciation, but later said that she would continue to present her act, wearing her usual costume which was just like the teletubbies, covered from top to bottom. Veteran female singer Titiek Puspa, who sat next to Inul during the discussion, is quoted warmly supporting her position. 'Inul: Saya Sama dengan Teletubbies' (Inul: I'm just like the Teletubbies), *Kompas* 18 January 2006.

4. Various meetings of creative artist were held, such as one at Taman Ismail Marzuki Arts Centre in early January 2006 involving prominent figures such as Rendra and Putu Wijaya. See 'WS Rendra Hingga Putu Wijaya Tolak RUU Antipornografi' (WS Rendra and Putu Wijaya Reject the Anti-Pornography Legislation), *Kompas* 6 January 2006. Novelist Ayu Utami is likewise reported expressing her rejection of the legislation ('Ayu Utami Dibikin Gerah RUU Anti-pornografi dan Pornoaksi' (Ayu Utami is sickened by the Antipornography and Anti-pornographic action Legislation), *Kompas* 10 January 2006.
5. The most prominent example of verbal abuse was the televised denunciation by the chairman of the Forum Betawi Rembug (Betawi Brotherhood Forum), a radical Islamic organisation, of participants in the rally as 'evil, wretched women who do not have good morals' (*Jakarta Post* 2 May 2006). Sinta Nuriyah Wahid, wife of former President Abdurrachman Wahid, who was one of the leaders of the march, subsequently took legal action against the organisation.
6. Michael Bodden refers to this incident in his article in this issue.
7. The title of the original play by Djayakusuma was *Wek-Wek* (Quack, quack). The reference to ducks relates to the meaningless quacks with which the accused responds to questions at his trial, avoiding answering, which are explained as the result of living in a rented room right next to a large duck pen.
8. Comments presented at the Workshop on Indonesian arts, culture and political and social change since Suharto, University of Tasmania, Launceston Tasmania, 16–18 December 2005.
9. The placards contain slogans such as 'Create peace' and 'It's forbidden to stay silent, come on speak!'
10. The name derives from a traditional *tembang* (Javanese poetry) supposedly composed by a palace dancer replaced by a younger woman. The term suggests a struck stone rolling along — women surviving in male-controlled society.
11. The scene takes place at the end of the performance *Iber-Iber Ledek Barangan* (Dancing girls in flight) The dancer Hartuk, as the aggressive winner figure, is challenged by Inonk. Although her face may be pretty her behaviour is obscene, as she seizes everything in her greed. Hartuk is unfazed 'I'm not afraid. Everyone is jealous of me', she retorts. 'Here, take this, swallow it all, gobble it up', Inonk says, using a crude term for animal eating, and tosses her a purse of money, presumably the proceeds of the group's performance. Hartuk is left alone on stage alone as her companions depart. This time no prayers or words of moral and spiritual wisdom complete the performance, just a display of greed and arrogance. Yet interestingly enough this scene, too, has been interpreted positively by male viewers; the renowned poet and

- cultural figure, Goenawan Mohamed, reportedly prefers its strong assertiveness to the endings of Sahita's other performances, praising it as a celebration of strength and survival.
12. Sahita members report that some members of the audience made such criticisms when the group performed at the Institute of the Arts (ISI) in Yogyakarta
  13. In the program notes entitled *The Plea of Dirah; Pembelaan Dirah* distributed at her 2004 performance *Badan Babagia* (The Joyous Body), Cok recalls reading her poem 'Namaku Dirah' 'My name is Dirah' in public for the first time in 1992. The poem is published in Indonesian and English in Cork (2000).
  14. Goenawan's opera libretto *The King's Witch* shows Calon Arang marginalised and reviled, sacrificed to the power of the central state (Goenawan Mohamad 2000); Toeti Heraty's extended poem describes her as a 'victim of patriarchy' (Heraty 2000), while in Ayu Utami's novel *Larung* a Balinese grandmother deliberately assumes the terrifying persona of Calon Arang, blended with the vilified image of the Communist women's organisation Gerwani, in order to frighten off an attack on her family by an anti-Communist mob (Utami 2001). (See also Michaela Campbell's article in this issue.)
  15. By August 1999 Megawati's party had won the general elections decisively but was being sidelined in the manoeuvring for the presidency. By the time of the second performance in November that year she had lost the presidential position to Abdurrahman Wahid.
  16. Program notes for the performance *Badan Babagia* October 2004 p.1
  17. See, for example, the play *Ketika Kita Kaku* 'When We Were Rigid', where Shinta and a fellow female performer are terrorised, assaulted and have their heads dunked in vats of water by groups of men.
  18. *Perempuan dalam Badai* 'Women in the Storm' staged in 2001, consisting of graphic narrations of their own experiences by a group of women victims.
  19. Yudi Tajudin (2003) reports, for example, on a festival of outdoor theatre events in Makassar illustrating the dynamism of modern theatre activity in the city.
  20. Biographical notes in her collection of poetry *aku bukan masa depan* mention that in 1999 Shinta helped found Angkatan Muda Perempuan Indonesia (Ampuni), the Young Generation of Indonesian Women, 'a community which fights for the abolition of violence' (Febriany, 2003:64).
  21. In a session at the Workshop on Indonesian arts, culture and political and social change since Suharto, University of Tasmania, Launceston Tasmania, 16–18 December 2005.
  22. Entitled 'Empowering Women' the program will run for three years in the first instance, from 2007 to 2010. Sinta Febriany is one of the three women

- performers selected for support, along with theatre director Tya Setiawati based in Padangpanjang, and the choreographer Hartati in Jakarta (Amna S. Kusumo, Director of Yayasan Kelola, program notes for the play *Kisah Tubuh yang Terasing dan Semu* August 2007 and personal communication).
23. Such views are summarised in Aston (1995) Case (1988) Keyssar (1996).
24. A seminal discussion of Brechtian techniques as appropriate and effective strategies for feminist theatre, much quoted in other studies, can be found in Diamond (1988).

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